

Guest Editorial

## **Libraries and the Social Media Networks**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Libraries and Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals have been greatly impacted by the social media and its networks in the recent past. The ever increasing growth of the Web resources, the ongoing advances in ICT applications, and the introduction of innovations for imparting better services to library users have transformed the LIS from its manual and semi-automated days to an automated global information system. The overload of information and the relevance of quality information in economic growth in various contexts exerts pressure on information seekers, many of whom are users of libraries. Library users are slowly being attracted by access to alternative resources and services on the Web, thus getting less dependent on library resources, except in cases where libraries offer much better services and resources to their users. The whole Web 2.0 revolution is making the technically and professionally sound LIS professionals to rethink about how to make libraries user-centric. However, many librarians have not been able to catch up with the changes that the Web is introducing in its scope and functioning on a day-to-day basis. Thus the libraries and LIS professionals are caught in the cross currents of the Web and social media that attack the very foundations of libraries. The unprecedented growth of content and equally rapid improvements in technology need to be tackled by LIS professionals by mastering their use and making such intellectual contributions to the quality of content which make the relevance of LIS professionals far more important than other service providers on the Web. In this special issue an attempt has been made to see how LIS professionals can use the social media networks to the advantage of their users and themselves.

### **2. RELEVANCE OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Social networks crowd source ideas that are shared by members of the network or public. Open social networks like Twitter share their ideas with everyone while closed social networks like Facebook and LinkedIn share them with members of the network. Each person can offer ideas and know-how to others who need them. This is possible only when we are prepared to collaborate with each other, gain from each other's experiences and let a transformation take place of an individual and the society he or she lives in.

In offices and companies, in the past, the knowledge present with individuals was withheld by many of them in order to continue exerting influence and remain in control of situations with or without helping the organisations they worked in. The use of social networks by the organisations make knowledge sharing possible more effectively and meaningfully. But it is the mechanism of sharing which is efficient in social media but it does not guarantee the quality of information that is shared through the social networks.

In the survey conducted in 2016 by researchers from Columbia University in the US and INRIA, the premier French institute, it was evaluated that 59 % of shared links are not being read by those who are receiving them through the social media<sup>1</sup>. At the same time content on the social media is growing and growing very fast. With the paucity of time, with the social media users, less and less number of links are being read. This leads to uncertainty of achievable results. Another study made by the American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), published in July 2016, reports that there is a gradual decline in the enthusiasm among the users of social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn<sup>2</sup>. Within these and other constraints, which are discussed in this special issue, we have to see how much each library can gain by using the social media and how.

The content available through the websites in the hidden Web can be evaluated and forwarded to the users but the content on the social media is difficult to be verified as any one can say or write anything and post messages on the Web. The job of the LIS professionals in future will be to forward to the user verified and verifiable content. But to forward social media content in its raw form is going to be rather risky for an LIS professional, unless otherwise stated. A concerted effort needs to be made to verify such content. The social media content that emerges in series by several people could have been triggered by rumours or false alarms. Phil Bradley refers to a rumour which we know about in which it was said that on January 2, 2012 Fidel Castro had died. About 50 tweets per second repeated

this information. This finally turned out to be incorrect information<sup>3</sup>. Having said that, the LIS professionals need tools that can be used for evaluating the content on social media sites. I may refer to ‘Social Mention: Real Time Search’<sup>4</sup> which is an analysis platform for social media content that aggregates responses from across the Web. However, the references that I searched on it did not convince me of the quality of information that I was looking for. Its scope has to increase further and needs to be evaluated. Among a large number of other social media tools that are used for evaluating and referring to social media content I may mention the following to illustrate the role social network tools play at present:

1. Addictomatic<sup>5</sup> searches blog posts, images, news, and videos for hottest topics.
2. IceRocket<sup>6</sup> searches real time blogs, Twitter, Facebook, news.
3. WhosTalkin?<sup>7</sup> searches blogs, news, networks, videos, images, forums, and tags.
4. Backtweets<sup>8</sup> searches the archives of old tweets.
5. Hashtags<sup>9</sup> identifies messages that have been tagged, which results in an archive in a single stream.
6. PicFog<sup>10</sup> searches images from Twitter.
7. Lanyrd<sup>11</sup> focuses on conferences and other related events which could be of use to LIS professionals.
8. ChaCha<sup>12</sup> answers questions with the help of selected guides around the world. How correct the answers are remains to be seen.

The basic issue, therefore, before LIS professionals today is that they have to select quality content on two fronts: (a) from the Hidden Web, and (b) from the social media. Many universities in the West have suggested criteria for doing so. In my opinion while LIS professionals should use social media and get conversant with it within the limited time each day available with them, there is the need to introduce time management to accommodate using social networking tools as well. But above all, special tools, some of which I have referred to in previous paragraphs, need to evolve further to select content that is reliable on which the researchers can depend upon.

The times when users would go to the library and collect information are fast declining. The users now go to libraries if the facilities in libraries make it easier for them to use quality Web resources. For otherwise they prefer not to go to the library. The time, therefore, has come for LIS staff to reach out to users. The published or Web resources of use to library users may be available through a library network or through online subscribable resources. To help such library users the social networks may be useful. Social networks can help the LIS professionals in several ways, including:

- (a) Socialisation by LIS professionals and keeping updated with developments in the profession
- (b) Quick spread of information
- (c) Communication from librarians to patrons and from patrons to librarians: for instance, information about new collections acquired in the libraries could be passed on to patrons and patrons could forward new ideas and suggestions about new titles for acquisition to librarians
- (d) Marketing of the products and services the libraries offer
- (e) Collaborative sharing of information
- (f) Access to the latest information on various issues
- (g) Managing Research & Development (R&D) operations
- (h) Facilitating decision-making
- (i) Imparting reference service
- (j) Promotion of library events: Information about competitions, exhibitions, meetings, talks, tutorials, workshops, etc. could be communicated
- (k) Cross-national study and mobility, etc.

### 3. SOCIAL NETWORKING TOOLS

In libraries, especially academic libraries, library users are educated and the possibilities of their already using social networks are comparatively high. And therefore, the library staff manning academic libraries should also be well conversant with the use of social networks for the specific needs of the library users. While the library users would mostly use Facebook and Twitter but the library staff should additionally use special social networking tools as useful to each type of library.

The use of social networking is increasing in the universities and libraries. Among them the academic libraries periodically use social networking tools to disseminate information about the library services and library rules. The

librarians can also get in touch with the students and the faculty easily. The social networking websites are free and allow users to create their personal pages. The users can add on these pages text, images, music, and videos. Now how far librarians can use this information depends if the user is a member of the library, or is interested in the subject in which the library specialises. Also, the use of blogs is useful for LIS professionals if the blog is created by a specialist. The blogs promote social connections and access to specialised information.

Like library networks, social networks also promote sharing of resources. For instance, you can develop profiles on You Tube and Flickr and you can share videos and images. There is more content sharing than social networking. These sites work as important resources of information for LIS professionals. I may refer to a few important ones: Blogs; Facebook (used for marketing; disseminating library information; updates and for socialising); Flickr; Instant Messaging (which allow two or more users to chat simultaneously and exchange ideas); Orkut (used mostly in Asia Pacific and South America); MySpace; QQ (used in China); RenRen.com (A Chinese equivalent of Facebook); Twitter (used for marketing, disseminating library information, updates); Wikis (used for communication between librarians and users and for frequently asked questions) and YouTube (for videos). Some libraries use Facebook as a noticeboard for promoting library services through text and photos. But to see how this information is used, the feedback from users becomes essential. This could result in developing interactive platforms on social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, etc., for providing reference service online. There are established guidelines for doing so and LIS professionals should adopt them.

#### **4. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL NETWORKS**

There are many challenges in implementing social networks in libraries. These challenges vary from library to library. I am highlighting the major challenges are as follows:

- (a) All libraries, say in India, are not modernised, especially most of the public and school libraries. In such libraries, first of all, the introduction of library automation, including proper infrastructure, Wi-Fi facility or good internet connectivity is a must.
- (b) All library staff are not fully motivated to take an extra step to reach out to their library users through social networking.
- (c) In the latest survey conducted in 2016 by researchers from Columbia University in the US and INRIA, the premier French institute it was evaluated that 59 % of shared links are not being read by those who receive them through the social media<sup>1</sup>. At the same time content on the social media is growing. In future, this percentage could further decline and affect the efficacy of the social networking tools.
- (d) In many libraries there is limited staff and where the staff is available, there is the limitation of time for them to use the social media networks. Using these networks becomes time consuming at times as one has to use them regularly.
- (e) Old staff many times are not interested in using social networks. They were also not trained to do so.
- (e) Library staff do not know which social networking tool should be used for which purpose.
- (f) Library staff needs to create an understanding with library users before starting the use of a social networking tool.
- (g) Many LIS professionals would not communicate well with library users on the same wavelength at which the library users do. Thus the divide.
- (h) Many young LIS professionals know only local languages and cannot handle social networking tools.
- (i) Social networking tools need to be introduced in libraries in a phased manner.
- (j) Libraries should get policies and regulations for the use of social networking tools approved by the appropriate authorities.

#### **5. TRAINING FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS**

It seems that there is an urgent need to provide training to LIS working professionals in the use of social networks. This training could be given to such professionals who are proactive and interested in undergoing training and whose managements are equally proactive in sending their staff to undergo this training. It is also important that in the LIS Departments in the universities the training regarding the use of social networks is made mandatory.

#### **6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY**

Libraries need to be part of the nation-building mechanisms and as knowledge centres libraries should offer knowledge to public in the fields of their specialisations. Knowledge is power and LIS professionals being so close to knowledge resources should make efforts to see how knowledge within their domains could result in power for

themselves, for their organisations where they work and for the country in general. Use of social networking tools will definitely bring them closer to knowledge and the people who need that knowledge. In these changing times, the use of new tools and technologies including social networking tools is becoming essential.

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## About the Guest Editor

**Dr H.K. Kaul** is the Founder Director of DELNET-Developing Library Network, and has worked as Chief Librarian of India International Centre, New Delhi. He served the Centre for 40 years. With his vision, he has established the DELNET in 1988 as the first major self-supporting library network in Asia. The establishment of the National Convention on Library and Information Networking (NACLIN) by him in 1988 has become an institution in itself. He has authored and edited 58 books, besides research papers and over 100 articles, in the fields of library networking, bibliographical studies, history, poetry and publishing. His books on Library Science and networking include *Library Networks: An Indian Experience*; *Library Resource sharing and Networks*; *Library and Information Networking* (12 vols.) and *National Library Services*. He has been the Chairman of several committees of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Ministry of Culture, and DRDO. He was the Chairman of National Mission on Libraries, Working Group on National Virtual Library, Modernisation and Networking of Libraries, 2012. He has been member of the Working Group on Libraries of large number of libraries.